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Guest opinion: Multiple wins in this water plan for Bonita Springs

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I advocate the outline of a Bonita Springs water master plan that could kill three birds with one stone:

Reduce flooding.

Increase the availability of cheap irrigation water.

Reduce pollution of the gulf.

Bonita Springs Utilities could pump water out of the Imperial River during the summer storm season at several locations. Placing pumps upstream from Old 41 could prevent future flooding of the downtown area.

BSU then could pipe the river water to their reclaimed water cleaning facilities and then to ASR wells to store the water in underground aquifers. BSU then can retrieve the water in winter for irrigation and there should be enough for all at a low cost. It costs about 1-2 million dollars to dig an ASR well.

I have worked out the cost-effectiveness figures of trenching irrigation pipes in all public Bonita Streets. Councilman Mike Gibson told me that he checked my figures with Community Development and that they told him that the figures are in the ball park. The work can be done gradually over a period of 5-10 years and will save BSU members about ten million dollars a year in water costs, this even after paying for the irrigation water piping at a cost of \$90 million financed over 30 years. Reducing the outflow of Imperial River storm water laden with pollutants and fertilizers will also help protect our beaches, reduce red tide and manatee deaths.

A question you might ask is why no one has come up with this idea before. The answer came to me when I was at the BSU annual meeting in March of 2018. Mr. Jenkins the BSU CEO

presented there an array of slides of the 2017 Bonita flooding without much comment or elaboration. He simply pointed out the locations and said “see flooding” and “more flooding”. I realized at that point that Mr. Jenkins had a vague idea that flooding involves water and that BSU is a water utility so it was a good idea to show flood pictures. He presented no ideas as to how to capture the water and reduce flooding.

So why is this not being done? The main reason, I think is divided authority. The city government cares about flooding and pollution. BSU focuses on supplying water and sewer services. In comparison, Naples runs its own water utility and has a master water plan that includes recycling sweet water into 2 ASR wells from the Golden Gate Canal.

I propose that Bonita Springs create an advisory board to study these issues and allow it to get expert help from SFWMD, BSU the DEP and others, as needed. The members of this board should have a background in geology, hydrology, geographic Information systems, civil engineering, soil science, communications or a combination of these. I would respectfully suggest that no unqualified GOBS (“Good Old Boys”) be appointed to this board. The GOBS stood idly by, or worse, took part in the sale of flood plain land to newcomers. So they are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Jude Richvale, a former chairman of the Bonita Communications Advisory Board, has over 40 years in information technology and geographic Information systems, a minor in geology and a major in communications. He was a senior consultant to several major utilities, including the New York City DEP, which manages five upstate reservoirs as drinking water for the city. She also is running for a position on the BSU board.